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ABSTRACT

The author discusses the acculturation process of first, second, and third generation Italian families in the United States in terms of the interrelationships among cultural, social, and psychological events. As background to the discussion, the role of the family is described. In southern Italy, the nuclear family is the essential feature of the social system. It is dominated by an authoritarian father, godparents are very significant figures, male children are social and economic assets, and female children are protected socially. Family relationships give the individual status and a guarantee of security. Upon immigration to America, however, Italian values conflict with Anglo-American orientations toward individualism and mastery over nature. Alienation and other psychological crises arise because of the immigrants' familistic personality orientation. In first-generation families, intercultural and intergenerational conflict and changes occur, often marked by isolation and anomie. Most second-generation families exhibit a move toward shaping the structure and functions of the family in accordance with the contemporary urban American type of family. Third-generation families show even more influence of industrialization and urbanization on fertility, child rearing, class status, and occupational choice. (AV)

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THE ITALIAN AMERICAN FAMILY

The Southern Italian Family's Process of

Adjustment to an Urban America

by *Lydio F. Tomasi*

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THE ITALIAN AMERICAN FAMILY

The Southern Italian Family's Process of Adjustment to an Urban America*

by Lydio F. Tomasi**

I. The Transplanted Family in Contemporary Research on American Society

Since World War II, in all parts of the world most social systems are moving fast or slowly toward some form of the conjugal family system and also toward industrialization. Many social scientists argue that the conjugal family system, with its standards of ascription, particularism, and diffuseness, is ideally not permitted to interfere with the demands of industrialization, whose standards are achievement based and universalistic. The concomitant emergence of the conjugal family and industrialization could suggest that all change and all causal relations flow from one single, global factor, such as industrialism, and that such modern phenomena as migration, urbanization, and acculturation must necessarily weaken or destroy the system of closely knit kinship bonds outside the nuclear family, which characterizes most of the 'folk' societies. "Modified extended family" theories, however, show that there is both a need and a capacity for extended families to exist in modern society, and that geographical mobility does not nec-

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essarily result in a lessening of ideological or emotional¹ commitment to kin.

In looking for how and why massive socio-economic changes help or hinder to outweigh the resistance of family systems, the southern² Italian migratory experience seems almost an ideal case. In fact, most of the many millions of immigrants who came to the United States from Italy were southern Italian peasants³, but they did not generally enter farming occupations in America⁴. They clustered primarily in the industrial centers of the North: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Baltimore, Detroit. Also, the Italian family undergoing the acculturation process in the United States is an ideal area in which to examine the interrelationships among cultural, social, and psychological events. Previous researchers have focus only two of these dimensions at a time, studying individuals against a family background in which the dynamic principles are never clearly specified. One has to observe the full range of cultural, social, psychological, and biological variables - the individual within the family as the small primary group within the larger social system with its system of values in a particular geographical setting - which are involved in the events of family life and the adaptation of the individual family member.

The main purpose of this paper is to delimit the contemporary controversy on the nature of the southern Italian family system, which has a special significance for the renewed interest in the persistence of ethnic identity in the face of strong forces for change. In a special way, teachers, social workers

or guidance officers must understand the conflict which ensues from the fact that the American school encourages the southern European student to pursue personal goals rather than those his family has laid down for him.

The family field must move from traditional sociological theory toward theoretical models which reflect more closely the enormous complexity of the subject matter. James Walters and Nick Stinnett, reviewing a decade of research, conclude: "It is interesting that theory upon which our research is based concerning parent-child relationships frequently ignores changes in roles among social classes and among ethnic groups over period of time. That parents have a differential impact among various ethnic groups, and that this impact is different at various stages of the family life cycle is not always carefully delineated."⁵ Carlfred B. Broderick re-echoes that conclusion:

"One of the distinguishing features of family theoretical development in this decade is the extent to which... new conceptual frameworks are beginning to grow out of the work done among different racial and ethnic groups within U.S. society."⁶ Actually, observed John Spiegel, there is no such thing as a single family type which can be said to be representative of all America.⁷

The social context of immigration is more diffuse and cannot be clearly explicated as the historical and political contexts, but it is nonetheless real and important. Immigration was not indiscriminate coming of unsocialized people without a past history. Immigrants were not just numbers. The United

States got a good deal more out of immigration than just people. It acquired an immigrant culture, which is a distinctive quality now recognized as ethnic pluralism. One of the major goals of American recent immigration policy as enunciated in Congress is family reunion. The family reunion goal was a major purpose of the 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act. The exclusion of certain members of the immediate family from any ceilings and the assignment of 74% of available visas to preference categories reserved for family members underlines the family reunification goal. In 1970, 24,397 Italian immigrants came to the United States. And southern Italian immigration is family based whereas, for instance, the Irish pattern of immigration shows that single young men and women usually make up the bulk of emigrants. A study of County Clare, Ireland, demonstrates that after the practice of dividing family holdings among children ceased about 1852, it became necessary for children to⁸ leave the family homestead and seek their livelihood elsewhere. Southern Italians, however, did not leave their homeland because the traditional family system was realigning itself. They experienced one type of family relationship.

In their book, A Family Business, the Iannis argue that it is the bonds of kinship - not crime or some network of conspiracy - which tie the Italian American crime families together, and to one another.⁹ "Because of the intensity of the Italian family structure," writes Robert Critchon, the author of The Secret of Santa Vittoria, "the acute loneliness of the removal that often leads to unhappiness, restlessness, selfdoubt - but

also creativity - is not too common as yet in Italian American culture." To the question asked by Mario Puzo: Why have writers of Italian descent made hardly any impact on the American pub-

¹⁰lic? Social historians answer that a basic difficulty has been attitudes of the immigrant parents toward education. In his study, The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child, Leonard Covello observed that "during the three decades or more that the Italian immigrant has been established in our large urban centers, in immigrant communities in which he tried to create a replica of the social milieu of his homeland, there is gone on a process of cultural transition, the nature and the extent of which have only been superficially appraised."¹¹ His main conclusion is that "the family pattern, that is its social basis, is for all practical purposes, one of the main sources of¹² maladjustment in the American milieu."

American interpretation of immigrant adjustment have commonly failed to respect the unique cultural attributes of the many and varied ethnic groups which settled in the United States. Although the Italians endured almost all of the hardships experienced by today's urban poor, they did not - despite the additional difficulty of having to adjust for the first time to an urban-industrial society - develop significant family dis-¹³organization.

If the southern Italian family was not 'disrupted' by the immigration and settlement in an urban society, in what way did it change and in what way did it influence the first, second and third generation Italian Americans?

II. The Family as the Social World of Southern Italians,

The starting point of the evolution of the southern Italian family is necessarily found in the condition of this social unit in South Italy prior and during the mass emigration from 1880 to 1910.

With the southern part of the peninsula, (Figure 1),

Figure 1



wrote Marion I. Newbigin, we come to a world apart, strikingly
different from the reminder of Italy. ¹⁴ It is one of the world's

underdeveloped and over populated regions; it suffers from high pressures of population on land resources and low standard of living. But "life in the south exalts the family."¹⁵

The family is the meeting place of the experience of the peasant's social, economic, and affective life. Its members, wrote Giovanni Verga, are "united like the fingers of the¹⁶ hand."

The concept of the family subsumes two institutions. The larger and the less important of the two refers to the family as a social group - the "famiglia" - and includes all blood and in-law relatives up to the fourth degree as well as those to whom one is related through godparenthood. The more important of the two units - the nuclear family - has reference to the family of procreation (father, mother, unmarried children), as well as the few godparents contracted during one's life circle. An expanded household would include the members of the family of procreation and some single relatives, while an extended household would refer to two related family of procreation.

The essential feature of the social system is the nuclear family. The nuclear family is tightly knit and headed by the oldest surviving male, who is generally the father. The nuclear family is 'father-dominated but mother-oriented.' The father is the head of the family. No one, not even the eldest son, to whom many privileges are given, undertakes an enterprise without first obtaining his father's blessing as an indication of permission. Despite the strong family feeling, a husband only occasionally

shows his affection openly for his wife. When ordinary disagreement arises between them, neither brooks any interference by others. Popular consent gives the father the right to discipline his children and even his wife. "Like a good weapon, she should be cared for properly; like a hat she should be kept straight; like a mule should be given plenty of work and occasional beatings. Above all, she should be kept in her place as a subordinate, for there is no peace in the house where a woman leads her husband."¹⁷

The mother rules the home merely as an interpreter of her husband's wishes; even when he does not deserve it, she loves and obeys him. She has two other outstanding functions: to select wives for her sons and to hold the family purse. She takes charge both of her husband's earnings and those of her unmarried children. Each child gives according to his ability and is furnished with funds at the proper time according to his needs. The daughter's dowry becomes the joint responsibility of the father and the brothers. The mother buys all the provisions for the home and all the clothing. Regardless of advance age, the mother does not yield her position to her eldest son's wife, but the latter does the bulk of the work. The obedience and submission of the daughter-in-law is the price of family accord.

All the sons in a family are regarded as more important social assets than girls. The primary basis for it seems to be the dowry system, which makes every daughter represent a debt that sooner or later must be paid. The precedence given boys

over their sisters in family relationships is also explained as fitting them for their future positions as husbands and fathers in this strongly patriarchal group. Boys and girls in schools and public places are carefully kept separate, but their preparation for marriage is quite different. The appearance of heterosexual interest in males is frankly recognized. Instead premarital lives of girls are marked by careful surveillance and always under their mother's watchful eye, otherwise both would be criticized and lose status. Typically 'honor' means 'chastity' for girls and fidelity for the married women. The set of taboos that enforce chastity upon women and especially unmarried girls set them upon a lofty pedestal above the passions that admittedly sweep the masculine world. The only physical trait generally thought indispensable in a marriageable girl is slenderness, since "fat women are sterile." Provided she is chaste, a girl can generally find some kind of husband. Girls who are not virgins at the time of marriage can be repudiated by their husbands. The matter of virginity is checked upon by the mother-in-law and sometimes also by the girl's own mother on the morning following the consummation of the marriage. Examination of the sheet on the bridal bed is the test. A bride is looked upon as a field ready for planting and the condition of the field is the chief concern. With such ideas of seclusion, chaperonage, virginity, fecundity, and feminine physique fully sanctioned by society, a girl has her career pretty well mapped up for her.

The nuclear family is a social group with centrifugal tendencies; at marriage children establish new households apart from either set of parents. A local proverb advises: "If you wish a happy life, stay away from your relatives." Sexual considerations and romantic love play little part in the selection of one's partner in life. The prospective bridegroom is allowed to 'see' his 'fiance,' without kissing or touching, only three times between the engagement announcement and the marriage, and never alone. The bonds of affection that keep man and wife together are thus formed after marriage in the making and maintaining of a home and family.

Closely associated with each nuclear family are first cousins and godparents of each of the members. Godparental ties are forged at the time of baptism, confirmation, and marriage. The godparent is, ideally, treated with deference. His or her specific obligation to a godchild is to set a moral example. The godparent is the only one outside the family circle in whom the child may confide. Although the girl is very seldom coerced into marrying a man she dislikes, sometimes she succeeds in picking the candidate, confiding her choice to her godmother who goes to his mother. If the man's mother thinks well of the match, the girl's parents are then brought into the matter, and the size of the dowry discussed. With all parties concerned satisfied, the matter is finally settled. The ambition of every mother is to see her daughters married as the consummation of her mission, before her death. Men assert that a wife might always be found somewhere. When a couple plan the details of their

marriage, they choose their witnesses with the greatest care, for these two automatically become godparents to their first born. Although the godparenthood refers to ties that are spiritual rather than of blood, often it refers to a combined relationship, since godparents are frequently the brother and the sister of the baby's parents. In any case, godparental ties are of great significance. The most exceptional power attributed to the godparenthood is that children inherit personality factors from these spiritual parents, despite the extent to which such patterns conflict with the children's own conceptions of themselves.

The close relationship of family members in the eyes of the community makes the actions of each of the greatest concern to all, especially because of their bearing upon the marriageability of each. The southern Italian, in fact, shows concern over issues which affect him vitally, or the wellbeing of his immediate family, but he shows almost pathological distrust toward persons outside of the small circle of the family of procreation, although he distrusts least those who live within the sound of the local church bell. "You can trust members of your own family first, relatives second, Sicilians third, Italians fourth, and forget about the rest of them."¹⁸ This 'campanilismo' finds particular expression in the strong societal taboo on marrying outside the immediate community. The contracting parties should at least be known to each other's relatives. Associated with this type of family organization is interfamily antagonism manifested particularly in the jealousy of property rights

indicated by elaborate marks of ownership. Those who are not in the family circle are regarded with fear and hostility, because the greater access an individual has to one's house the more of a threat he represents.

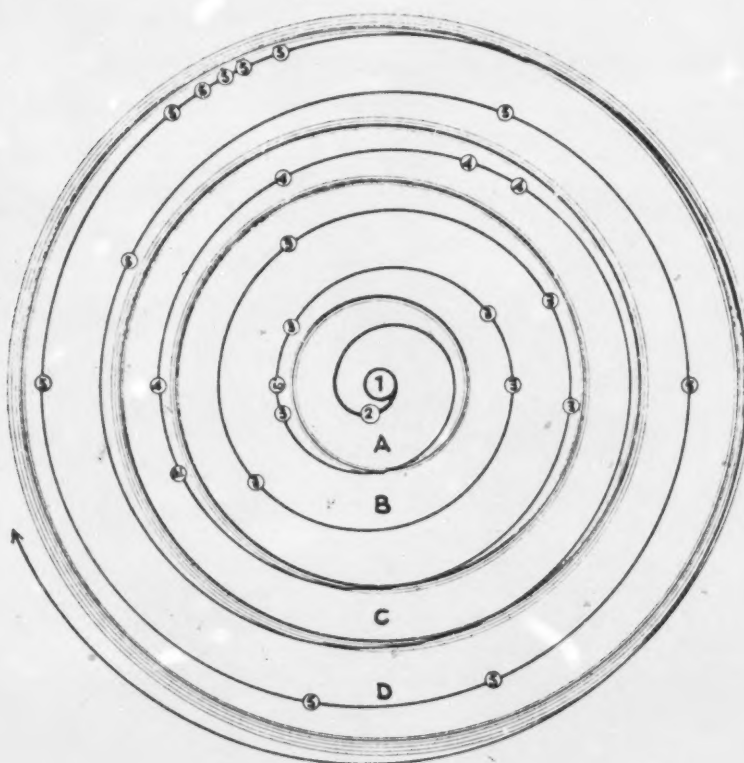
Although individuals act as if their social world were circumscribed by the nuclear family, they are required to rely on many others besides parents and siblings. The clustering of anxiety and disaffection around extrafamilial relations can be understood as a product of the incongruity between the instrumental social techniques they learn in order to manage others of their family and the social environment with which they really have to cope. The structure of the family is inextricably associated with the structure of the society of which it is a part. But in southern Italy to a large degree the whole social system and the family system coincide. The family sentiment is practically the only sentiment with a social content. The nuclear family is a closely knit organization within which the larger family solidarity is fostered and handed down from generation to generation. The family is a small universe, an inclusive social world. Only in this environment predictability and mutual trust reign supreme. Upon the death of a father, for example, relatives assume more or less cheerfully the job of helping the widow and orphans. The only people obliged to seek shelter in the poor house are those pathetic persons who have no family. The unity of society is the family, not the individual, and family relationships give the individual his status and guarantee a measure of security. One does not so much 'achieve' anything as

'obtains' something in south Italy. An individual's destiny is predetermined by being born into a family that owns land or into one that does not. His or her fortune is predetermined by the inability to earn a livelihood sufficient to achieve the cultural symbols pertinent to upward mobility. Absence of the means to acquire those symbols of status places an effective ceiling on the upward mobility. That ceiling blocks aspirations for enhanced prestige throughout the rural areas of southern Italy. Individuals, therefore, cannot be viewed apart from their nuclear family. The bonds of their social responsibilities are circumscribed by the advantage of their nuclear family, as if they were following this rule: "Maximize the material short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise."¹⁹ Goodness and badness exist for them mainly in connection with two statuses, that of 'parent' and that of 'outsider-who-may-affect-the-family.'

The southern Italian culture has clearly a unifying focus properly characterized as 'familism,' which seems to be the ethos of peasantry. But Edward C. Banfield is not justified in qualifying this familism as "amoral," because in the psycho-cultural and economic context in which southern Italians are now considered,²⁰ that is the only possible morality. Neither is there evidence to extend familism to prove the socio-political absenteeism of southern Italians.²¹ However, Banfield's central argument that the ethos or Weltanschauung of the southern Italian community is centered around the family is accepted by most social

Figure 2

THE SOUTHERN ITALIAN PSYCHO-MORAL FAMILISTIC SYSTEM*



READ:

A = Area of Obedience & Dedication
 B = " " Solidarity
 C = " " Fidelity & Generosity
 D = " " Respect

1. Father
 2. Mother
 3. Brothers, Sisters, Grandparents, others members of the family
 4. Friends
 5. The "others" - "forestieri" or strangers - not hostile to the family (equal or holding religious, scholastic, political authority).

*Adapted from P. G. Grasso, Personalita' Giovanile in Transizione (Zürich: Pas-Verlag, 1964), p.55.

scientists. The individual is socially and interiorly organized around the family, which determines status, roles and values for him. His personality develops out of, and is sustained by, his essentially familistic orientation (Figure 2). Familism as referring to a kind of central pervasive psychic interest and cultural value emanating from the family system is summarized in Figure 2.

The young man (io) finds himself inserted in a closed familistic system that includes the four areas of obedience and dedication, solidarity, fidelity and generosity, and respect, which are centered around the parental figures demanding a specific moral behavior. The whole system is seen by the subject rotate around the father's figure to whom is granted the right of utilizing all the components of the system - including the figures in authority - for the interest and, eventually, the defense of the family. Part of the psycho-moral familistic system are also the fiance' (lei) and the invisible world of the supernatural realities, that consecrate and sanction on the level of the absolute, the moral familistic relationships.

III. The Intergenerational Process from Familism toward Individualism.

The geographical mobility of the population is a permanent fact. Today, every young man is in a state of migration - even if he does not go away remains in an environment of cultural and, therefore, personality change. And yet migration had many unusual consequences for the southern Italian peasant. He lost a great deal of his background, in which old country conditions favored development of a fixed, closed and regulated familistic system of cultural forms. He left this closed community for an open and impersonal one.

Since integration is a matter of generations, the maintenance of family solidarity in the first generation should assist the integration process in the second. The acceptance of cultural pluralism during the first generation should offer greater prospects of accomplishing the ultimate merging during the second and third generation. But the study of immigrants assimilation would remain on its most superficial level if it stops at pluralistic integration as the mode of coaptation of migrant groups in industrial societies. Immigrants are not just things or categories of various sexes and ages and cultures and economic systems, but they are individual human beings, "grappling with the anxieties and pleasures of life in a new world."²² In the process of adjustment, which is a very slow process of growth without sudden jumps, the central concern is the personality equilibrium of the individual. As shown in the second section of this paper, in the southern Italian familistic

system the individual is alienated. The dimension of kinship seems to absorb the dimension of man. This is in contrast with the 'a-familistic' individualism of the urban industrial American society. The cultural values of peasant southern Italians, for example, are in contrast with those of the American middle-class family toward which the Italian Americans are moving in the acculturation process (Table 1).

TABLE 1

CONTRASTING VALUE ORIENTATIONS: ITALIAN-AMERICANS AND ANGLO-AMERICANS*				
Subculture	Man-Nature	Time	Activity	Relational
Italian-American	Subjugation to Nature	Present	Being	Collateral
Anglo-American	Mastery over Nature	Future	Doing	Individualistic
*Adapted from J. Spiegel, <u>Transactions: The Interplay between Individual, Family, and Society</u> (New York: Science House, 1972), pp. 140-309.				

This brief sketch of the two value orientations profiles reveals the extent of the cultural gap that confronts Italian families when they arrive in the United States. It takes a long time before the process of acculturation makes much of a change in the Italian's value system. As the shift takes place, however, the spouses in these families often find themselves in conflict with each other because of the shift to the American value orientation has been unequal. Although some American values have been partly

adopted, the old native patterns have not been wholly relinquished. In a strange situation, as in a foreign land, lack of prior experience makes culturally appropriate roles difficult to achieve and the observer does not know how to define the situation. This produces an internal ambiguity or malintegration of values within the individual. We can then assume that familism can be taken as a cultural scheme integrating the personality of southern Italian immigrants. Consequently, the alienation and other psychological crises experienced by southern Italian immigrants arose primarily out of their familistic personality orientation. Thus, only by reintegrating and restructuring their personalities in the direction of enhancing their valuation of the human person and of personal values could these immigrants overcome their crises. But was the necessary transition of the family system toward a new integration reflecting the changes going on in society a conscious effort of moving from 'familism' toward a distinctive individualism characterized by solidarity which arises out of collaboration for the good of the community or was it toward a "splendid isolation?"

A transition did take place in the transplanted southern Italian family. As where 'la miseria' - the degraded and impoverished condition of the peasant and his humiliation in the fact of it - was intensified, the old traditions in the structure of family life were strengthened, so where industrialization and a chance of upward mobility have developed, a more modern and

progressive family culture has evolved. The southern Italian peasants who migrated to the United States in the early 1900's were proletarian villagers unaccustomed to urban industrialization. Their adjustment in this totally new physical, social, and cultural environment was guided by traditional customs and laws that were suited to the former time and place. First- and second-generation southern Italian Americans in urban ghettos were in effect 'villagers' in that their familism was derived from their ethnic background. The degrees of loyalty to one's family followed a kind of genetic progression. The slow and complicated movement of the first- and second-generation Italian families away from the southern Italian pattern and toward the contemporary American family "type" can be better visualized in the simple form of Table 2.

1. First-Generation Southern Italian Family in America

23

The first-generation southern Italian family embodies the initial contact and conflict stages in the process of acculturation. This is a family in transition, marked by considerable confusion and conflict. The very fact of physical separation from the parental family and village culture, the necessity to work also for the housewife outside of the home for wages and to operate with a somewhat strange and foreign environment and tools, urban ecological conditions, and above all, the children "going American" produce the incipient uneasiness among southern Italian immigrants. But the main source of conflict is their familistic culture contrasting with the

Table 2

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SOUTHERN ITALIAN PEASANT FAMILY IN ITALY AND THE FIRST AND SECOND
GENERATION ITALIAN FAMILY IN AMERICA*

Southern Italian Peasant Family in Italy	1st Generation Southern Italian Family in America	2nd Generation Southern Italian Family in America
A. General Characteristics:		
1. Patriarchal	Fictitiously patriarchal	Tends to be democratic
2. Stationary	Mobile	High degree of mobility
3. Active community life	Active in Italian neighborhood	Active in American community
4. Children live for parents	Children live for themselves	Parents live for children
5. Many family celebrations	Few family celebrations	Christmas and Thanksgiving only
6. Strong in-group solidarity	Weakened in-group solidarity	Little in-group solidarity
7. Many children	Fair number of children	Few children
B. Roles and Statuses:		
1. Father has high status	Father loses high status	Father shares his status with family
2. Mother center of home only; does not work for wages	Mother may work for wages and belongs to some clubs	Mother reserves time for much social life and work for wages
3. Women are educated for marriage only	Women receive some formal education	Emphasis is on general education
C. Interpersonal Relations:		
1. Husband & wife must not show affection	They tolerate it in married children	Husband & wife may be demonstrative
2. Boys are superior to girls	They are regarded as superior	Still regarded as superior, but girls have high status also
3. Selection of mate by parents	Selection of mate by individual with parental consent	Selection of mate by individual regardless of parental consent
4. Must marry someone in the same village	At least same region and religion	Increasing marriages outside nationality and religion
5. Dowry rights	No dowry	No dowry
6. No birth control	Some birth Control	Birth control is the rule
7. Sex matters are not discussed in family	Not discussed in family	Increasingly discussed in family
8. No divorce allowed	Not allowed, but some do divorce	Religion forbids it, but is practiced
239. Desertion is rare	Desertion is rare	Desertion is rare
10. Family provides a specific way of life	Family is in conflict	Family reflects confused American situation, but marginality is weakened 24

*Adapted from Paul J. Campisi, "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States," American Journal of Sociology, 53:444-446. May, 1948.

emerging of people's new awareness of themselves as they begin to think of themselves as individuals.

Familism colors the value-orientation of the first-generation southern Italian immigrants. Values more connected with the familistic orientation remain mostly substantially unchanged, while other values evolve more rapidly. When familistic values are central in the motivation of 'actors,' their roles tend to assume the conservation and expansion of the family or of the individual within the family in-group. The traditional heritage serves as ideological function for the individuals of that society. The 'expected' behavior of the young does not vary proportionally to the evolution and growth of the individual, but it remains substantially the 'expectation' of a 'minor,' (that is, anyone who does not have the status of the head-of-the-family), whose behavior must be determined by socio-familistic responsibilities. The individual is a function of the family. He totally depends from the parental authority. The gratification of his sexual impulses must be suspended according to the fundamental criterion of the family interests. His scholastic achievement, his job, or his fiancée are valued in view of a better 'position' or 'honor' of the family and interpersonal relationships outside of the family's nucleus are almost eliminated.

It becomes increasingly difficult to play these roles in a milieu different from the traditional one of a closed and stationary society. In such a society the environment, which is cultural continuity with the family, seals the individual

from suggestions extraneous to his ideological patrimony and strengthens the normative system of the family through general conformism and public 'dishonor' affecting the deviant from the 'expected' role. But in the open, dynamic, pluralistic and urban American society the individual soon finds himself in a psycho-moral conflict, with regard to his essential roles, because the authentically individualistic environment pushes toward an independent and egocentric realization of the roles of the young, rewarding with social prestige the eventual transgression of the parental norm of role. Unfamiliar with the autonomous and rational decision-making process and without the framework of a set of superior values, immigrants keenly experience a 'moral impotence' under a strong instinctual pressure strengthened by a stimulating environment. Its consequences are anxiety, insecurity and crisis.

The practice of courtship by individuals and the selection of mates on the basis of romantic love regarded as an inalienable right in the new society create some of the most serious disagreements within the family, which 'expects' that any dating has its conclusion in marriage, and finds it difficult to understand the American girl who puts herself only on a purely friendly level. The problems imposed in Italian girls by the greater freedom of association with the other sex are met with little more to guide them than their mother's traditional admonitions. The stigma on exogamy has not been forgotten, but it starts breaking down, because a man and a girl become acquainted

while working in the same place of business. In sharp contrast to the American conception of marriage as "companionate" and as a service to the spouses, in the southern Italian culture marriage is considered a familistic institution. It is structured with the goal of contribution to the realization of the essential functions of the family, as an in-group: its physical and cultural identity, its perpetuation in the children, its social and material rise. The conjugal link is, therefore, infrangibly welded to the intra-family solidarity; separation and divorce become unthinkable. That solidarity will psychologically continue even after death, because everything must be done or mutually sacrificed to keep the "two together." Besides, the conjugal dyad is 'unbalanced' toward the male pole: the wife has always, at the end, to give in to the husband's opinion, although there are degrees in acceptance the old mores. When a woman questions the authority of her father or husband, her waywardness is blamed on lack of discipline during her childhood. But the discipling of children in this country is controlled by laws. Fathers of the first generation and their children both know this and are influenced by it. The southern Italian has not yet adjusted to this situation adequately, either by developing new methods for inculcation the discipline society expects, or by learning those currently conceived in America as the correct devices for child training. The children thus grow up with less sense of the significance of social laws than did their parents. Irrational method of indoctrination through repetition of the norm and its fixation through a reward-punishment system of the 'consecrated' southern

Italian immigrant father, "is of little use to his children²⁴ in their effort to adjust to a new world."

In this transition from the stagnant, gregarious, and rural sociocultural system of South Italy to the dynamic, individualistic and urban American system, inter-cultural and inter-generational conflict and changes intermingle, but it is possible to detect a psychological dynamics of the social integration of the southern Italian immigrant family. The first phase is marked by isolation, and anomie. Immigrants lack experience of social interaction outside of the family. They are bewildered at the 'deseccration' of the family values, and are forced, in a defensive move, to re-evaluate their own traditional values, but without avoiding the weakening of their normative character. They uncritically accept new norms not as values internally bounding but as procedures or instrumental indications; deeply they remain anchored in the set of internalized familistic values. This behavioristic incoherence has functional reasons not always clear, and is always accompanied with anxiety, sense of guilt, and tendency of 'returning.' Change or cultural adjustment takes place in the effort of synthesizing the old and new values. Frustrations, privations, and loss of self-respect deriving from living in a new society with the cultural instrument of the old country, generate an awareness of limitations of one's own values and a thrust to adopt new ones. Such adjustment takes place in a selective way, that is, according to the dispositions of the changing personalities of the interacting cultures. While assimilation is smooth and

fast on the level of economic progress, education, equality and order, it is much more difficult for the southern Italian immigrant to accept the individualistic spirit of the American culture with the 'independence of women and children,' a spirit which opposes on all levels the southern Italian spirit of gregarious dependence from the family. For him to focus the 'economic' on the values level is a cultural heresy. But is it possible in an industrial society to keep non-integrated the level of economic instrumentation and the level of goals?

Culture is, in fact, a function of the social system that it serves. For southern Italian immigrants from a familistic society coming into an individualistic a-familistic culture, a thrust to change their familistic culture becomes a functional necessity. In reality, the process of change starts from the periphery toward the nucleus of family relations.

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Young male southern Italian immigrants admit that it is possible to change the 'Italian' ideal of the family. The qualities they like to see in their future wife are more personal than related to the family, and most of them would like to equally share authority in the family. Some agree that the wife can work outside of the family. Although de facto almost all women are engaged in factory or industrial work, the 'spirit' is still familistic. There is, again, a dychotomy between cultural norm and behavior. The work of women outside of the family does not mean the acceptance of women's rights to 'expand' in the social and professional life, but it means to take advantage of a mir-

aculous occasion to help the 'progress' of the family.' Most immigrants overcame the old southern Italian model of restriction, or even segregation, of girls to the house. However, the evolution does not notch the essence of the familistic cultural model, because almost all not only still admit the discriminating distinction between man and woman in the rights to social life, but uphold the necessity of a social control, denying to women the exercise of an autonomous responsibility. So, in spite of some practical compromises and certain incoherent forms of behavior, the substance and its 'informing spirit' of a familistic culture still remains. Its persistence is related to the whole social system. It is not the family directly involved, but the entire socio-economic system which conditions the family's functions. Such a system originated the 'familism,' because it forced the family to completely assume the obligation of protecting and serving the individual, in conditions of such structural isolation and socio-economic precariousness that it called for a concentration of the family on primary needs and its authoritarian and depersonalizing 'polarization' of all its members for survival.

2. Second-Generation Southern Italian Family in America.

Many students of the second- and third-generation Italian American family see in it patterns of organization and orientation similar to those of strong patriarchy in the medieval Italian family, and of obedience to tradition in the southern Italian

24 families. They describe the patterns of family structure among Italian Americans as initially patriarchal; in subsequent generations, as Italian Americans become assimilated, they would begin to internalize American family norms and generate the kind of matricentric family structure characteristic of American family life.

The range of class and regional differences among American family patterns seems to preclude significant statements of central tendency presupposed by that oversimplified view, which does not take into consideration the partial pluralism of American society. "On one hand, we do not yet have measures of the centrality and durability of ethnicity in the personalities of Americans. On the other hand, we do not fully know the extent of influence ethnicity has had on American family patterns."²⁷ From undergoing researches it seems to emerge that among Italian-American families there exists simultaneously a patriarchal and matriarchal family authority structure. The patriarchy is public and conscious, the matriarchy is 'hidden' and unconscious. The authority of the father appears to be one of verbalizing final decisions, but the home is the domain of the wife. She attempts in every way to reduce any disagreements to questions about the household where she has jurisdiction, and she points out to the husband that as the father of the family it is his obligation to command what is right, but she points out what the right thing is. Thus, she avoids face-to-face confrontation and power conflict which enables her to maintain publicly and consciously her convictions and belief

in a patriarchal system while at the same time actually retaining power. The father is the legitimate authority who has a certain amount of power, but the influences of industrialization and urbanization have served to decrease the degree of power of the patriarch. The father rules according to ideals and law. However, the ideals are established by the family, and the law is what is taken by the members of the family as being the right thing to do. On the other hand, the traditional affiliation of Italians with Roman Catholicism serves to strengthen the authority of the father in the family. The fact that children in this adult-centered family are not planned affects the way in which parents relate to them, and the methods by which they bring them up without being concerned with 'developing' them. Second-generation parents have accepted the need for education, but they - like their own parents - have continued to maintain the traditional demand that within the household the child must obey parental rules. The adolescent however, does not accept the traditional pattern, and searches for 'action' which generates a state of quasi-hypnotic excitement enabling the individual to feel that he is in control both of his own drives and of the environment. It allows him to forget that he is living in a routine-seeking world, where 'they,' that is, the routine-seeking adults, make and enforce most of the rules. The second-generation Italian is apt to choose his wife for reasons other than thrift, industry and knowledge of housekeeping. Sentiment plays a part to a degree unknown before, but to the girl's parents the American innocent freedom of dating seems a 'wild'

behavior threatening their family honor. Coeducation has particularly devastated the old taboos on social intercourse between boys and girls, and the traditional southern Italian belief that sexual intercourse is unavoidable when a man and a woman are by themselves. The barriers between male and female are translated into a "marital relationship that can be best described as 'segregated,' as distinguished from the 'joint' relationship that characterizes the middle-class family. There is less communication and conversation between husband and wife and much less gratification of emotional needs of one spouse by the other. These functions are handled by other members of the extended family. But families are smaller among second-generation southern Italians than among their parents. Women of the first-generation became pregnant every year or so, because of the passive and subordinate condition of the wife and of the strength of religious taboos against any interference with sex impulse. Children do not appear so frequently in the second-generation Italian families. The percentage of children for Italian women in the 1910 census is 6, while in the 1940 census, ²⁸ the percentage is about 5.5. However, the high fecundity of Italian women before 1920 is not only due to familism, but also to the biological selection of immigrant women and to their high and early marriageability. After 1920 there is a rapid and continuous diminution due to the transition from a peasant environment to an industrial and urban one, but the astonishing rapidity with which the transition acted upon Italian women has further

reasons. The First World War - except during the lustrum 1920-25 - stopped, mass immigration. The economic crisis of the 1930 made it difficult for the working class to have children and favored the propagation of anti-conceptional methods. To the working class belongs the second-generation immigrants, who as 'foreigners' were the first to be laid off from their jobs. During the period between the two World Wars there is, then, a strong tendency in the Italian immigrant group to conform very rapidly to the fecundity level prevailing in the American population. In this sense, in the span of twenty years, the demographic assimilation of the Italians seems to be complete, according to census statistics. But that this implies an equally complete and definitive acceptance of the new customs and of new conceptions of the meaning and function of the family, is only an hypothetical induction. After the 1936, American statistics ceased to present data of births distinguishing by groups of immigrants, and there are no data at all about births of the second-generation of immigrants, which data would be essential to assess the demographic assimilation of the Italian group.

The individual of the second-generation is, in fact, socialized under a dual influence of American and Italian culture. Consequently, he is in a state of psychological conflict. "The second-generation Italian cannot escape from being a member of American society and from being constantly shown that he will be punished, or will not be rewarded, by his fellow Americans for behaving like an Italian. The Italian part of the community likewise demands that individuals conform to certain norms if

they are to be accepted as members of the group, and rewards²⁹ individuals for living as members of the group". The second-generation southern Italians react to this conflict in different ways. They tend to adjust either by completely abandoning any tie with the southern Italian heritage and passing for an American, but this is rare; or by gradually shaping the structure and functions of the family in accordance with the contemporary urban American type of family, but intimate communication with parental household and with immigrant relatives is maintained, and this is the most representative type; or by orienting inward toward an Italian way of life, but this is very rare.

a) The 'rebel reaction' to nationality problems involves a predominance in the individual of the tendency to achieve complete acceptance by the American group by ridding himself of habits and associations that mark him as Italian. The 'rebel reaction' is found in an expressed preference for non-Italian girls, by marrying either a girl who is not of Italian descent or one of Italian descent but who is, like himself, a rebel against the Italian group. They desire to sever Italian affiliations with their parents and siblings and their expectations. They tend not to turn over their pay to their parents as expected by southern Italian family structure; but mostly the individual is willing to accept the frustrations imposed by adherence to this trait rather than suffer the frustrations that would result from arousing his parents hatred. In accordance

with American pattern of family organization he is determined not to dominate his wife but to have a relationship of equality with her, in his planning to give their children full information about sex, and in his wanting his wife not to devote herself to housework entirely but to have outside interests of her own and be free to leave the house when she wishes. So, despite group barriers, the individual continues his effort to become thoroughly American.

b) The 'in-group reaction' strives to resolve the conflict brought about by the conditions of acculturation by accepting and confirming the affiliation with the Italians as a distinctive group within American society. The in-groupers show a greater tendency to go out with Italian girls, but they do not restrict themselves entirely to them. Girls from other nationalities are generally supposed to provide more gratification in a casual relationship than Italian girls. But the 'in-groupers' prefer an Italian wife, because they think it will be better for them and for the family, to which they feel strong loyalty. They usually follow the Italian custom of turning over their entire pay to their parents, although they resent patriarchal rule. The tradition of large families is not sustained. "Barriers are imposed by the American group against the attainment of full membership in it by a second-generation Italian. These barriers do not lose their character as barriers when the in-group reaction is adopted. The individual is not actively striving for personal affiliation with the American group, but he

is striving for the dominance in American society of the Italian group with which he has affiliated himself. Barriers set up against individual attainment in American society constitute also barriers against the rise in status of the Italians as a group. Thus they remain a threat to the individual's feeling of status and security, for that is gaining in part through his identification with the group."³⁰ To the extent that a person is striving for acceptance by Americans, his affiliation with the Italian group is a barrier. The 'rebel' responds to that barrier by hostility toward the Italian group. It is quite possible, Irving L. Child stated in his study of male second-generation Italians in New Haven, Connecticut, that the hostility of the in-grouper toward other nationalities represents a displacement of the aggression that is felt against the Italian group as a barrier.

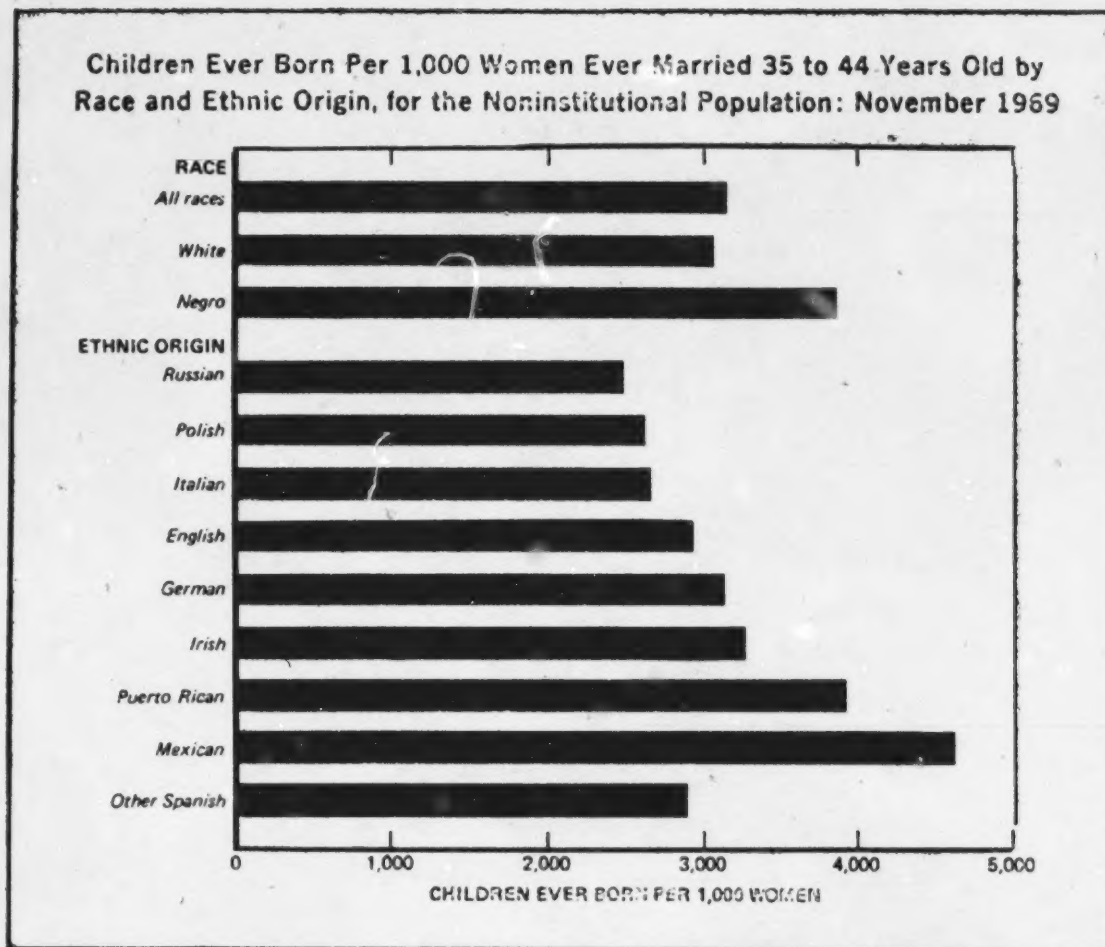
c) The 'apathetic reaction' involves the attempt of the individual to remove himself from the conflict situation, by de-emotionalizing the symbols and facts relating to nationality, by an attempt to deny the personal significance of the societal and cultural conditions to which the individual is responding. In the course of this retreat the emotional significance of the facts and symbols of nationality grouping is blurred and diminished. There is an effort at a compromise solution of the conflict. The apathetic individuals do not show any marked tendency to restrict their social life with women to either Italian or non-Italian girl friends. Nationality makes no difference in considering a possible wife, although they

prefer an Italian wife to escape from barriers a non-Italian may impose upon him. Most of the apathetic individuals turn over their entire pay to their parents, accepting an Italian cultural trait which is a very good symbol of the more general trait of family solidarity and parental control. This accommodation stage begins when children reach adulthood and marry and establish household of their own. The success of the first-generation family instills in the offspring respect and affection for the parents. And the gradual understanding by the children that successful interaction with the American world is possible by accepting marginal roles assures them that complete denial of the Old World family is unnecessary. Considerable intermarriage makes the transition comparatively
31
easy.

3. Third-Generation Southern Italian Family in America.

Italian-Americans in the third generation and beyond tend not to exhibit these traditional patterns. The decimation of the family circle by differential mobility is one step in a larger social process that brings nuclear family members into a more intimate dependance on each other. The influence of industrialization and urbanization on fertility, residential mobility, occupational choice, class status, child rearing, and on other family behavior is evident. According to a recent Census Bureau study, for example (Table 3), women of Italian, Polish and Russian-Jewish origin have had fewer children than
32
white women generally. Katherine F. Sandalls found that

Table 3



U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No.226, "Fertility Variations by Ethnic Origin: November 1969," U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1971.

Catholic third-generation women of Irish ethnic origin have higher mean cumulative fertility; higher fertility ideals, and higher fertility expectations than Catholic third-generation women of Italian ethnic origin regardless of the controls imposed on the data for nativity, religiousness, Catholic education or socio-economic status. But the view that the middle class, suburban and upward mobile third-generation Italian Americans are familistic only to the degree that others in their class, regardless of ethnicity, may also be familistic, and that they are losing their ethnic identity and are assimilating American culture is based upon observation of only the most superficial levels of behavior.³³ On another level, a retention and reinforcement of ethnic bonds seems too evident. On one hand, Italian-Americans have learned to extend their sense of loyalty beyond the family and the village, and their successes in the U.S. have taught them to trust the government and to enter into a kind of clientele relationship with it. On the other hand, the rejection and prejudice experienced by the first- and second-generation Italian-Americans in the larger community led many to reject their family allegiance and their heritage in order to be Americanized. These become a traditionless and socially disorganized group of individuals. Others responded to the attempts at amalgamation by reinforcing their traditional values and their 'Italianness.' Out of the conflict of this second group with the American community, a modification of the lives of both parties was engendered so that today, as Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan concluded, the ethnic

group is no longer a remnant of the past but a new social form. Once Italian-Americans migrate into suburbia, their ecological and sociocultural characteristics of cohesive family life can be explained in terms of suburban and middle-class culture other than their history, but it remains open to research whether their familism can be traced more clearly to traditional roots than to middle-class culture.

IV. The Interplay between Individual, Family and Society.

Further study is needed on the consistence and direction of the ongoing process of socio-cultural change of the southern Italian family, in connection with the general process of transformation of the Nation and of other ethnic groups. An unanswered question is still how much and in what sense familistic culture and religion are related; how much the changes in attitude by southern Italians in this country toward the authority of the Church and the observance of religious duties have resulted in corresponding changes in the conceptions of parental control and of the rights of women.

Our analysis shows that in the southern Italian culture the key institution - "the only Italian institution" - is the family. As a functional consequence, the individual is absorbed by the family in-group, and, therefore, alienated. 34 Under the impact of an industrial civilization, the whole southern Italian familistic system is in a state of physical, cultural and social change. A psychic, moral and 'spiritual' disturbance affects the immigrants personality, which tends to disintegrate. Immigrants reveal anxiety, deep discontent, and 'moral' deviance. They lack an individualistic orientation, indispensable in a modern socio-cultural system with a universalistic ideal of man and with attitudes defining social relations 'in general terms,' without any consideration of the

qualities of the interacting individuals or the circumstances of the interaction. In practice, the individual as such becomes the center of motivation of social relations. The immigrants psycho-social crises, then, seem to be overcome only by the transition from familism to individualism. This does not imply that in an industrial society the family ceased to be functional.³⁵ The general crisis of the immigrant family indicates only that the family in its present form and orientation is not functionally adequate to serve the individual in a new social context. The critical process of cultural assimilation and intergenerational adaptation of the southern Italian immigrant family is not one of dissolution, but one of transition toward a new integration of its values and its roles. Substantial equality of man and woman, diminution of the father's authority concomitant to his diminished 'necessity' on the economic-professional level, differentiation and professionalization of roles, and other family behavior are proving to the southern Italians that the family is not the only or the principal institution to serve the individual, but that it is one of the subsocial systems, related to, but differentiated from, the whole system. It is the coherence of cultural, social, group, and individual processes - their relative integration within a conflict-control field of behavior - that can be identified as the specific condition which must obtain if the person and his family are to function at an optimum level of behavior. The overcoming of 'familism' is, then, required in order to give back to the family, purified of its historically conditioned

"authoritarianism" and freed of its alienating anxiety for 'primary' needs, the possibility to serve the individual also in his 'superior' needs, thus favoring his growth and total expansion.

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